On the use of "good" in Genesis I.

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ON THE USE OF "GOOD" IN GENESIS I.[1]

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If the reader will take his Bible and make a list of the divine acts recorded in the first chapter, he will find twelve, or eleven if he regards the work of the fifth as only one transaction. Cleared of extraneous matter, and numbered, they stand as follows:

(1) Creation; (2) The Spirit of God's moving; (3) The light begins; (4) Dividing the light from the darkness; (5) The firmament; (6) Emergence of the land; (7) Grass, herbs and fruit trees (present flora) (8) The introduction of unequal days and seasons; (9) Water creatures and fowl, our present kinds; (10) Cattle, beasts and creeping things, the land animals of to-day; (11) Adam.

Looking through the chapter again he will find that only six acts are pronounced **good.** The others are by far the most important, since they include the creation, the Spirit's moving on the waters, and the creation of Adam, as well as the dividing of light from darkness, thus causing day and night, and the firmament, yet not one of these is said to be good.

If a mere man wrote this account, what reason had he for this distinction? If it came from the All-Wise, the question is at least equally pertinent; and if it all was given by Him—the facts, the words in which they are described and the order in which they are placed—there must be some explanation based in the actual history of the past which will justify such seeming unreasonableness.

The account was put into writing several thousand years ago, when nothing was known of what occurred before man made his appearance. This ignorance continued through the subsequent ages down to the birth of modern science, and, indeed, in a very large degree till within a few decades. There is much to be learned yet, but with two exceptions—the date of the earth's axis becoming inclined 23½ degrees, and that of Adam's creation—every point needed for our purpose has been settled. Some facts amply established have not yet passed into general circulation, but, nevertheless, we may use them, since they are true.

Good can not in this account refer to moral character, since that is not possessed by light, or land, or plants, or fishes, or birds, or cattle. Indeed, the only created thing to which good in this sense would be applicable is man, and to him it is not applied.

The LXX rendered the word by *Καλος*, literally beautiful, the Greek mind regarding beauty as almost the equivalent of good. Taken in the latter sense, the same objection applies as before, but if *Καλος*, simply means beautiful, this, too, must be ruled out, for was not the firmament beautiful, and man? as much so at least as land and water, cattle and fishes?

There is another meaning, as common in English as in Hebrew. A

[1] Taken in substance from "The Problem of the Ages"—not yet published.

good watch, a good knife, a good farm are instances in point. Here good means, fit for its use, and needing no more done to it.

God created the heavens and earth, not solid finished worlds arranged as now in systems, but mere, nebulous matter thousands of times rarer than air. The earth itself was an unsegregated part of that boundless ocean, "without form, and void," having neither land nor water, plants nor animals, and unfit for all now upon it.

It was not good, and He who gave the account indicates that fact by not calling it good.

The imparting of motion was but the beginning of the divine work, not finished till the end of the six creative periods, and, therefore, not ready at that early period to receive the verdict of completion.

After that we read of light. Now we know, thanks to spectroscopic study of nebular light, that at first the light was very poor, able to give only a faint three-banded spectrum instead of the brilliant seven-banded one we get from the sun. We know, too, that as the nebulous matter condensed the light improved, and when its density equaled that of the sun its light became the same as solar light and possessed of the same properties, and therefore deserved the verdict good, and it got it.

The earth—at that time self-luminous—continued to cool, and in due time was covered with an opaque crust, thus making a division between light and darkness, and causing what we call Day and Night. Celestial mechanics teaches that the axis of the earth was then perpendicular to the ecliptic; hence there could be no seasons, and no variation in the length of the days. More work needed to be done before this arrangement was completed. Hence at that time it ought not to be called "good," and it was not[2] so called.

The firmament is not pronounced good. Thanks to scientists, we now know that such a verdict would have been a blunder; for instead of the present life-giving atmosphere our world was then surrounded by a dense mixture of poisonous gases fatal to all animals save possibly the protozoa. It was not good, and is not so called. After this the dry land appeared from under the water and, at last, as geologists have shown, through a long and slow process became covered with soil fit to support present vegetation. It was, therefore, good, and so it is styled.

Next we read of grass, herbs and fruit trees, plants fit to support the population toward which creation had been tending, the flora which we have to-day. It was fit for its intended use; hence it deserved the verdict good, and it has it.

The next great act was that of so arranging "the lights in the firmament of heaven"[3] (sic) that they should henceforth give unequal days

[2] It is here assumed that the earth's axis was at first perpendicular to the ecliptic. Any mechanical theory of the evolution of the earth requires such an axis, and there is abundant corroborative evidence in the uniform distribution of plants before the Tertiary. But I have neither space nor time to discuss it now, merely remarking that scientists are confessedly ignorant as to the date or cause of the present obliquity.

[3] There is no more interesting part of this account, or one requiring larger scientific knowledge for its discussion, than this. I have treated it quite fully elsewhere. Space forbids it here.

and seasons; make the year a common measure of time, but not affect months, for months are not mentioned. In other words the earth's axis now became inclined 23½ degrees. But whatever it was that was done, it was final and fitted for man. Hence it was pronounced good.

Then followed the production of water vertebrates ("great whales," etc.), and those of the air (fowl), the end of animal development in those elements, and fitted for present uses. They were, therefore, entitled to the verdict of completion, and they received it.

After them came cattle, beasts and "creeping things." This concluded the long series of land life and indicates the fauna of to-day, fit for all present purposes. Hence they also were entitled to, and received, the verdict of completion; and since that time they have made no progress, intellectually, morally, or physically. The animals on the Egyptian monuments represent equally well those of to-day.

Adam, however, was created with the power of indefinite development. Even as an animal he had much to learn, but in the higher part of his nature he was to become incomparably greater, as he passed on through time and eternity. Hence the verdict of completion could not be applied to him. And it was not applied.

By this time the inchoate nebulous matter had been wrought into suns, planets and systems; the foul mixture of poisonous gases had become the present life-sustaining atmosphere; the early uniform days had become such as we now have, with the charming variety of seasons, and the mysterious moving of the Spirit of God had done its work and man had been put over it. All was fully ready for the drama of redemption. God seeing all this, pronounced it finished and all **very good.**

To sum it all up. Each transaction completed before the next one gets the verdict good. Those completed later do not get it. To have done otherwise would have broken the chronological order, which is the most marvelous characteristic of this chapter. At last, all being finished, on the whole assemblage is pronounced the final verdict very good.

The above is one of the many lines of argument which, to those whose knowledge of physics and geology is sufficient to make them realize its power, prove that this chapter came from Him who in the beginning created the heavens and earth.

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